

'Bush's rude awakening'

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For six years, President Bush lived the political dream: a president whose party controlled Congress. He got everything he asked for, billions here to cut taxes for the rich, billions there to pursue his war in the Middle East. GOP leaders in Congress watched all of this placidly, supporting the president's every whim.

But after saddling the country with billions in debt and miring us in war, the president and his party got a rude shock last November: They lost control of Congress. Now they're seeing their chances to hold onto the White House evaporate. With Democrats now in charge of Congress, the president's rubbers tamp is gone and American taxpayers are no longer his personal ATM.

President Bush may hope to keep spending \$175 million every day in Iraq during his final year in the White House, but Democrats aren't playing along. We would prefer an open, honest debate about this country's budget priorities. Unfortunately, this debate isn't happening because of the audacity of his stubbornness.

The president talks of working with Congress in a bipartisan manner, yet every spending bill sent his way that was passed with bipartisan majorities is met with a veto threat. His strategy for governing is to convince just enough members of Congress to support him, effectively confounding the process. Americans know this is bad government--and even worse leadership.

After taking control of Congress from the Republicans (the so-called fiscally conservative party), Democrats have drawn tight the nation's purse strings. We have resurrected fiscal discipline through a "pay-as-you-go" policy, meaning we put an end to the GOP tactic of free-spending. Instead of wasting \$600 billion on the president's Iraq misadventure, Democrats are fighting to support our children, families, workers and veterans. We're struggling to invest in our national infrastructure, in programs that have been gutted under the president's watch.

So this is the debate we'll be having for the next few weeks.

At the same time the president is asking for \$200 billion for the occupation of Iraq, he has the nerve to say we can't afford vital domestic spending. The president would have us cut vocational education by half, cut education for handicapped children by \$300 million, cut law enforcement grants by one-third, cut mental health services by \$160 million, cut physician training at children's hospitals by 63 percent, cut rural health programs by 54 percent, cut the clean water revolving fund by 37 percent and cut disabled housing assistance by 47 percent.

Bipartisanship does not mean America must bow to the president's stubbornness. Bipartisanship means that we discuss our priorities for America, we give and take and produce a budget to benefit the whole country. We need to work together, as we've been doing in the House of Representatives.

On a bipartisan basis, we have been working for common interests, not special interests. We have passed the largest single increase in funds for veterans' healthcare in the 77-year history of the VA. At no new cost to U.S. taxpayers, we increased college student aid by \$21 billion. We provided \$6.4 billion to the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast, an area largely ignored by the president. We also twice passed SCHIP, a program that would cover 10 million uninsured children. And we raised the federal minimum wage for the first time in a decade.

These are the reasons America sent Democrats to Washington.

Congress' job for the remainder of the year is to hammer out the appropriations bills that fund the government. Unfortunately, the president has recklessly declared that he will veto any bill with a single dollar more than he has requested. This political-bullying is just another example of the president's inability to lead. His idea of inspiration is turmoil and fear.

Rep. David Obey, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, clearly defined our differences when he said, "It is not credible for the president to make a federal case out of our desire to provide \$20 billion for veterans' healthcare, cancer research, Pell grants, energy research and law enforcement while he wants to spend ten times that much in the Iraqi black

hole."

For six years, President Bush has made Americans fear the future. But the American spirit won't buckle under his domination. Democrats won't give in to the president's poisoned politics. We will continue to repair the president's damage and champion the hopes and dreams of all Americans.